

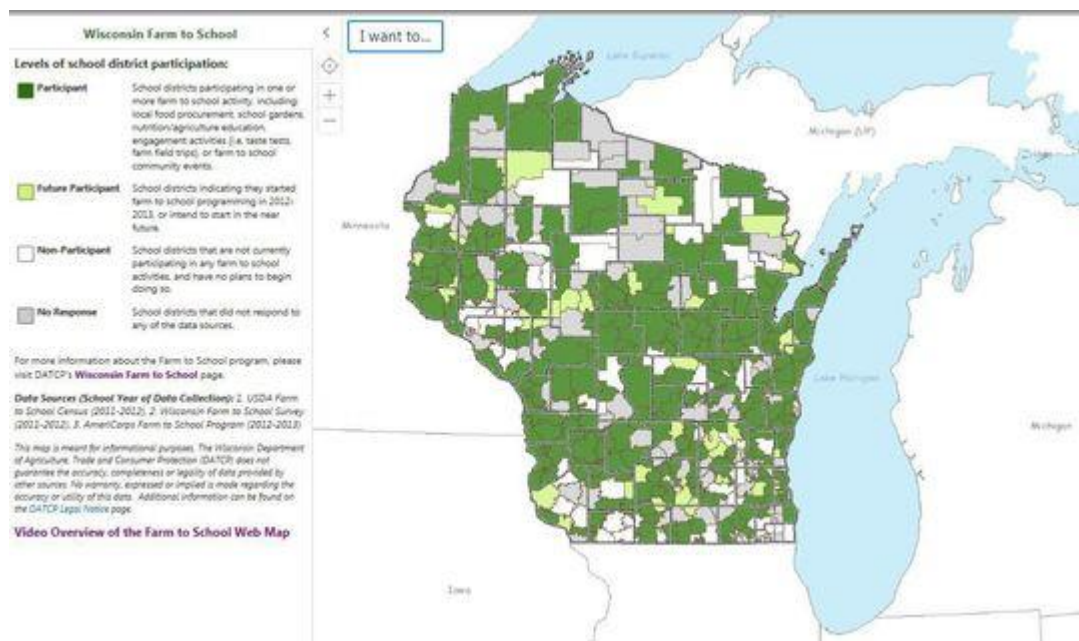
Wisconsin Farm to School

Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

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In today's Wisconsin Farm to School newsletter, you will find:

- [Introducing the Wisconsin Farm to School Interactive Map](#)
- [Farm to School success story: REAP Food Group](#)
- [The Harvest Medley Project](#)



View DATCP's new interactive Farm to School map [here](#).

Introducing the Wisconsin Farm to School Interactive Map

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection is proud to release one of the first interactive maps in the nation of state-wide farm to school participation. The Wisconsin Farm to School Interactive Map makes it easy to locate school districts across the state that are participating in farm to school. Searches can even be performed by farm to school activity types, including:

- Local Food Procurement
- School Gardens
- Nutrition/Agriculture Educational Activities
- Engagement Activities (i.e. taste tests, farm field trips)
- Community Events (i.e. community garden celebration)

We are thrilled to see the abundance of dark green districts populating the map, for this connected landscape across the state represents the more than 50 percent of Wisconsin school districts currently participating in farm to school. There is much to discover about farm to school in Wisconsin, and we hope you enjoy learning about some of these features by exploring the interactive farm to school map!

Farm to School success story: REAP Food Group





Garden Bars for All: Leveraging Persistence & Creativity to Achieve Success

In Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD), REAP Farm to School AmeriCorps members lead interactive small group assemblies to

introduce elementary school students to their new garden bars. For many of the students, this is their first time using a tray in the lunchroom as students at schools without the salad bar get a 'hot pack' and a 'cold pack', which they usually stack together while picking up utensils and milk. After being handed a shiny blue tray at an assembly, one student exclaimed, "I feel like I'm in high school!" It is exciting to see students empowered by their new garden bar and the trays that come along with it. This is a small illustration of several known facts: salad bars are a great avenue by which to get fresh, healthy, and local products into the cafeteria, and are also excellent at encouraging students to think about their eating habits as they exercise autonomy over their meals.

The garden bars, aptly named by MMSD since they allow students to choose between five and six different fruits and vegetables in lieu of assembling full salads, is the most recent farm to school initiative undertaken by REAP Food Group. Based in Madison, the local food system-focused non-profit is thinking big with their plans to implement garden bars featuring local produce in all of the MMSD schools. The primary goal fueling this project is to increase fruit and vegetable consumption among children, which has been a demonstrated outcome of implementing school salad bars. A recent Cornell University study* found that when presented with a choice to eat carrots or celery sticks, 91% of students ate carrots, versus 69% of students that ate carrots when it was served as the only option. Salad bars are also effective at reducing the amount of food waste generated from school lunch, as "students are more likely to eat a fruit or vegetable if they have the power to choose it," says Natasha Smith, the Farm to School Program Manager at REAP Food Group.

To date, REAP has assisted MMSD in implementing 23 garden bars in elementary and middle schools within the district, and is hoping to continue building on this pattern of growth. The organization has recently secured funding from the City of Madison for garden bar refrigeration at several more schools, and will soon hire a school food service consultant, thanks to a USDA Farm to School Grant, who will evaluate district opportunities and constraints so that MMSD can move forward with the most sustainable farm to school plan.



Now that many garden bars are in place, REAP's goal is filling the bars with local produce. There are several challenges to this endeavor, including inadequate kitchen equipment and staff time for processing fresh produce. The district currently prepares and distributes pre-packaged meals from a central kitchen site, so many individual school lack most standard kitchen equipment. In addition, the central kitchen typically works with pre-processed produce, which poses a skills and equipment barrier to farm to school, as local produce is most readily available in whole form. The central kitchen at MMSD presents both a challenge and an opportunity for local products, says Smith. While substantial investments would be necessary to process a large volume of produce on-site, the streamlined central kitchen distribution channel already in place would allow for easy and equal provisioning of the local produce. REAP is also utilizing the FEED Kitchen, a shared kitchen space, to process local items, and looks forward to assessing the viability of the available processing options.

Another opportunity and obstacle in integrating farm to school into the garden bar program is the school food procurement process. School food contracts are typically set up to ensure low prices and ease of ordering. As a result, "the bidding process ends up being dominated by large distributors and exclusive of local farmers," says Smith. In hopes of tackling this institutional challenge, REAP has been working with the MMSD Food Purchasing Specialist to create a summer produce bid that allows farmers more flexibility, for example, the ability to bid on certain weeks of the season that align with the harvest dates of their produce. Smith says this gives the farmer the freedom to "commit to single products for shorter periods of time, say, cucumbers for the first two weeks of July, rather than committing to a produce contract for an entire month, or longer." The summer is a perfect time to pilot this alternative bidding process both because it is peak harvest season and because it will provide a light introduction for the school year bidding process, with less students and a smaller volume of produce involved in the summer meal program. In the meantime, REAP is busy planning for the upcoming academic year and National Farm to School Month in October, by assisting the district in procuring locally-grown produce throughout the month. This past October was a success as over 300 pounds of local produce was served on the garden bars, and nearly 2,000 pounds of the Wisconsin Harvest Medley, a blend of local root vegetables, was served in the hot lunches.

Despite facing several institutional barriers, REAP has crafted thoughtful approaches to address each hurdle as they work towards building a strong and sustainable farm to school garden bar program within the Madison Metropolitan School District. Resounding approval from the schools, students, and parents, in addition to grant awards, has helped to establish a solid collaborative partnership between REAP and MMSD. Smith says that "more than ever, MMSD sees REAP as an ally and farm to school as a valuable (and feasible) vehicle for health and positive change." Steve Youngbauer, Director of MMSD Food and Nutrition, says that parents often tell him that their kids are eating more vegetables, both in school and at home, since the garden bars were introduced in their schools. This exciting feedback further motivates REAP's mission to provide local fruits and veggies to children on a daily basis. The non-profit has shown that even the largest of goals can be achieved with a strong vision, persistence and a dash of creativity.

* Just, David R., and Brian Wansink. "Smarter lunchrooms: using behavioral economics to improve meal selection." *Choices* 24.3 (2009): 1-7.

The Harvest Medley Project

Harvest Medley Project: The UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agriculture Systems's has published a Research Brief describing the development of the Harvest Medley locally sourced and minimally processed vegetable blends for schools (and other institutions) with support from a 2012-14 WI Specialty Crop Block Grant. The brief covers the challenges and successes that occurred in the development of the products and their supply chain partners. To read the full brief, see <http://www.cias.wisc.edu/growing-farm-to-school-supply-chains-with-local-vegetable-blends-research-brief-96/>.

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